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Lisbon General In Race Inspires Hope and Fear

By JAMES M. MARKHAM

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LISBON — Gen. António Soares Carneiro, an ambitious 52-year-old officer who is praised by some as the incarnation of military virtue and feared by others as a potential military strongman, was recently selected as the presidential candidate of the governing Democratic Alliance.

After several months of back-room maneuvering, Prime Minister Francisco Sá Carneiro hand-picked the general as the candidate of his conservative alliance in the elections that will probably be held in late December or January.

The officer, who was promoted to general in February and holds a staff job today, is little known outside the army. To make him more familiar the Democratic Alliance is reported to have chosen Vitor Cunha Rego, a one-time far-leftist who has drifted to the right since the coup on April 25, 1974, and is now in charge of state-run television.

Battle of 2 Generals Likely

By disclosing the choice early, the Prime Minister hopes to persuade his long-time political foe, President António Ramalho Eanes, to decide against running for a second term. But sources close to General Eanes, who won three-fifths of the vote in the 1976 race, suggest that he will run again, so it looks as if the two generals will be battling for the leadership of Portuguese democracy.

The Prime Minister wants to subordinate the military to civilian control — something that has rarely happened in Portugal — and believes that presidential powers should be trimmed. But Portuguese who know General Soares Carneiro, a man of few words, a Roman Catholic, an enthusiastic reader of St. Thomas Aquinas and an opponent of birth control, doubt that he will accept being relegated to a ceremonial role. "What astonishes me," a well-placed officer commented, "is that Sá Carneiro has picked an officer who, if he is elected, the first thing he is going to do is cut off Sá Carneiro's political head."

This view is not universally shared. Adelino Amaro da Costa, the brilliant 36-year-old Defense Minister, described General Soares Carneiro as "a purely Western, classical kind of democratic

chap of Europe."

The Defense Minister, who played a key role in selecting the Democratic Alliance's candidate, said of the chief executive's future powers: "He will not be Queen Elizabeth. Probably he will be more than General Eanes, less than Giscard. If there is mutual comprehension between the President and the Government, the President can do more things."

General Soares Carneiro has spent most of his military career in administrative positions in Angola, where he helped found the first Portuguese antiguerrilla commando units, policed the diamond mines at Lunda and held the top political job of Secretary General of the colony before the 1974 coup, which felled the long-time dictatorship.

One of his closest collaborators in Angola was Col. Gilberto Santos e Castro, who after independence collaborated with the American Central Intelligence Agency and the guerrillas of Holden Roberto in their unsuccessful struggle to oust the new leftist Angolan Government. Back in Portugal, other members of the Santos e Castro family put General Soares Carneiro, then a lieutenant colonel, in touch with the rightist Center Democrats, one of the two main parties today in the governing Democratic Alliance.

Though against the coup, Colonel Soares Carneiro accepted it, but he was arrested in March 1975 and held for several months by the new left-wing authorities on suspicion of participating in an aborted rightist coup led by Gen. António de Spínola. Freed, the officer began to organize clandestine anti-Communist cells in the military, which were linked with similar civilian groups in northern Portugal.

After the countercoup on Nov. 25, 1975, that halted the revolution's leftward drift — an operation masterminded by General Ramalho Eanes, then a lieutenant colonel — a dispute broke out among the ascendant "operational" officers over what attitude to take toward the Communist Party. Colonel Soares Carneiro is reported to have favored suppressing the Communists, while Colonel Eanes was opposed, fearing that such a move would be a first step toward the right.

General Soares Carneiro's strong anti-Communist feelings inspire fear in the ranks of Alvaro Cunhal's pro-Soviet party, and Democratic Alliance strategists make it clear that they believe their candidate could bring the Communists to heel — though they insist he would never ban them. But the general's candidacy has elicited considerable talk of the need for a "muscular democracy" to wrestle with the nation's problems.

Support of High-Ranking Officers

In the military General Soares Carneiro is believed to have the support of high-ranking staff officers of similar political views, but less among younger "operational" officers. As president of the Association of Commandos, he has the fervent backing of many of the 14,000 former members of the one-time elite unit. Former commandos serve as bodyguards at Democratic Alliance rallies and are expected to provide a political network for the candidate in the campaign.

In the Eanes camp and in the Socialist Party, aides are busy researching General Soares Carneiro's colonial past. It seems probable that old speeches in support of the Salazar dictatorship — "pure fascism," according to one Portuguese who has had a glimpse at them — will begin to seep into the press.

Democratic Alliance leaders insist that they are not dragging the army back into politics. "Gen. António Soares Carneiro has been chosen by civilians without any prior consultation with the armed forces," Defense Minister Amaro da Costa insisted. "We never asked them: 'Who is your candidate?'"

"My point of view was always that it should be a military man," said Francisco Lucas Pires, a key Democratic Alliance strategist. "This makes it easier to dispute the terrain with General Eanes. The armed forces is still in a way the Portuguese royal family."